

**Rancière and the re-distribution of the sensible: the artist Rosanna Raymond,  
*dissensus* and postcolonial sensibilities within the spaces of the museum**

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**ABSTRACT:** Through aesthetics we can articulate affective politics and demonstrate new ways of 'doing' progressive politics (Rancière, 2004). The paper explores the politics and practice of dissensus, within the museum with artist Rosanna Raymond. The paper argues that the museum space when critiqued through a postcolonial perspective and artistic practice, can be a vehicle for political change. Using Rancière's account of 'politics' the paper outlines how a 'redistribution of the sensible' might be possible, that is inclusive of Maori space-time, self-determined cultural values and geoaesthetics.

## **I Rancière and Māori at the museum**

Inspired by Rancière's intervention into the relationship between politics and aesthetics, this paper examines *dissensus* (2010) as a political realm that can occur at the space of the museum to inspire a visualisation of an inclusive postimperial palate and postcolonial museological practice. The particular museum in the frame here is the British Museum (BM), this is where the performance artist that I have collaborated with since 2005, Rosanna Raymond, has performed, curated and published whilst engaged with the Māori Collections. The BM here is posited as a political space that is integral to the reproduction of civic values, norms and citizenry (Bennet, 2005). Our collaboration has involved dialogue (2005-present), co-presenting (Raymond and Tolia-Kelly, 2013), co-production of publications (Tolia-Kelly, 2016a; 2016b), and a continuing relationship through intellectual partnership reflected in our work.

“We have collaborated on building ideas, refining theory and practice, sometimes weaving them together and sometimes letting them sit side by side, we have created spaces for both our voices to talk to and through each other.”

(Rosanna Raymond 24<sup>th</sup> May 2017 in personal correspondence)

The museum here is framed through Rancière's concept as being a space of 'police order' where the practical sensibilities of being and interacting, (moral geographies) are shaped, defined and disciplined through dominant values of citizenship and state. Rancière is not held up here as a champion for postcolonial sensibilities or indeed as non-Eurocentric theorist, but as someone, who despite these contingencies can provide tools to think through aesthetics as powerful and politically able to usurp accepted 'regimes of truth' (Hall, 2001) and representation (Hall, 1997). The democratic palate of sensibilities, grammars and vocabularies proposed by Rancière are precisely the subject of early Postcolonial Studies (see Krishnan, 2009); the exposing of the problematics of using the seemingly 'universally consensual' language of expression as itself shaped by oppressive, exclusionary foundations. Ironically, Rancière's theorisation is based on exclusively European sensibilities and texts, themselves articulating through a narrow aesthetic palate. Despite this, Rancière enables a space of revising and repositioning of a palate of (geo)aesthetics defined through self-determination which are counter to the dominant accepted cultural values, histories and hierarchies. The Postcolonial Studies project also has been and

can be limited in its outcomes, namely that they can only lead to a re-textualisation in the language of the coloniser (Spivak, 1988) or iterate the fact that postcolonial thought 'asserts that anticolonial resistance tacitly reproduces the cultures and values of imperialism' (Krishnan, 2009: 265). In its logical conclusion, the political act of *dissensus* creates the possibilities of new taxonomies, paradigms, and palate of sensibilities, determined by the subaltern. This demonstrated by the creative and curatorial interventions of Rosanna Raymond at the Māori galleries at the BM. The presence and performance of the artist and interactions with the collections embodies a postcolonial critique in dialogue with the gallery spaces of the BM, resulting in new formations of display, engagement and space-time framings which are post-imperial in their logic. Krishnan articulates the ways in which postcolonial approaches, sensibilities (see Crang and Tolia-Kelly, 2010) and practice can engage with the museum space (2009: 265).

*"Postcolonial thought . . . scrutinizes the dominant rules of representation set in motion by knowledge production in academia and beyond. If the colonial and anticolonial subject has been trained to produce truth effects within a particular regime of truth, it is tacitly understood that other ways of seeing and saying must now be imagined, not the least part of which is to infiltrate and recode the received terms of disciplinary knowledge."*

Rancière's *dissensus* takes this intervention further to create or refigure the very frameworks and sensibilities through which 'Other' cultures can determine the cultural grammars and vocabularies through which their nations are narrated. Rancière, reflecting on the '(p)olitics of aesthetics' (2004), has been inspiring to those who research visual culture within geography including Lisle (2006), Staheli (2008), Dixon (2009) and Poole (1997). Others such as Bassett, (2014), Chambers (2011) and Dikeç (2005) have considered Rancière's account of 'pure' politics in spaces of dissent. Rancière's largely historical, Eurocentred, account is focussed principally on Balzac and Flaubert, within his oeuvre I found key elements of his arguments help me think critically about the politics of postcolonial aesthetics and re-thinking Spivak's (1988) question of 'Can the subaltern speak?' in terms of visual culture rather than literary cultures is the focus of this investigation. Can postcolonial art and aesthetics produce ways of critique, overcome and form languages and grammars of expression that genuinely counter colonial and imperial artistic grammars and values. What is the aesthetic language and praxis that is possible despite being in the double bind of being defined by and using the tools of colonial expression and rule. Rancière argues that firstly that aesthetics can be considered 'as the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience' (2004:13). And secondly that '(a)rtistic practices are 'ways of doing and making' that intervene in the general distribution of

doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility. For Rancière, “the political is *inherently* aesthetic” at the conceptual and substantive level. Rancière argues that this is not simply about the fact that formal politics depends upon the mustering of emotion and affect via iconic images and spectacle, but that politics in itself - ‘is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what can be seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time’ (Dixon, 2009 citing Rancière 2007, p13). Essentially, Rancière argues that aesthetics, produced through artistic practices, are locked into an elite world of networks of production and self-perpetuating representational reference points and thus the dismantling of the ways we think of artistic regimes of production can contribute to a more democratic politics and aesthetics. Philosophically, by equalising the regimes of the spaces of art production with the formal accounts of political democracy, we are able to see exposed the partiality or indeed the hegemonic power of both regimes of democracy and formal aesthetics. The politics of aesthetics is about recognising inequality within the political order that claims to represent the people. These political governors in turn use aesthetics grammars effectively to legitimate their version of democracy and as

such, aesthetics are beholden to this narrow account of politics, representation and aesthetics. Thus human expressive cultures, for Rancière are within the domain of the elite; controlled and governed. Politics is the space created when the dominant status quo is challenged and struggled against. A space created for those who have held no sanctioned platform or voice. He argues: “(P)olitics exists when the natural order of domination is interrupted by the institution of a part of those who have no part” (Rancière, 1999).

Exposing inequality through dissensus, in the legitimated systems of politics and circulation of aesthetics, artfully ‘destroys all the hierarchies of representation and also establishes a community of readers as community without legitimacy, a community formed by the random circulation of the written word.’ (2004:14). Art, or the practices of the visual can actively *disturb* ‘clear-cut rules of representative logic’ assumed to be legitimate and accepted, and the ‘clear partition between works of pure art and the ornaments made by the decorative arts’ (2004, 15). Rancière argues that an aesthetic regime is what has been taking place and more crucially that this aesthetic regime orders the sensible so that art and life no longer appear separate from each other. This account of aesthetics calls for a replacing of earlier notions of art as mere representation. The potentialities highlighted by Rancière for the exposing and potential deposing of imperial paradigms and palate of sensibilities. The very presence

of an embodied postcolonial critique can be disruptive, usurping and force a refiguring of the relationships between art and artefact, aesthetics and imperial taxonomies, and the museum experience for racialized cultures.

As a result, the *surfaces* of artistic production - the aesthetics of furniture, the pictorial, written text, the visible planes of expression, are critically at the heart of politics, and not simply forms which reflect or are simply illustrating a *context to* politics. Aesthetics are both powerful and are at stake in the political world in its entropic states. For Rancière (2009; 2010), democracy is produced and legitimated through aesthetic practices and in turn creates the shackles that bound what can be termed aesthetics – both are morally and politically co-constructed, intertwined. Aesthetics, within artist practice, can refigure the terms of the political in terms of the grammars of engagement, and indeed roll back occluded accounts of human expressive cultures, historically. Aesthetics and the sensory are closely bound into the work of driving human political consciousness and the means of expression which communicate political voices. ‘Power is a thing of the senses’ (Kathleen Stewart, 2007: 17) and as such can be redistributed through a new architecture of the sensible; enabling a new distribution of the sensible. Through aesthetics we can articulate affective politics and demonstrate new ways of ‘doing’ democracy. However aesthetics here are not about



purely representing what is possible. Aesthetics are for both Rancière (2004) and Stewart (2007), are a fundamental force in affirming uneven democracies and indeed being part of the tool through which inequality is compounded, if not designed. In this paper the path is to elaborate on what can be achieved politically. For my purposes the Imperial taxonomies defining the sensibilities of global peoples, and their art and culture have fixed accounts of the hierarchies of arts, culture and capacities of 'others' are present at the sites of national galleries and museums. The gallery space affirms the exclusion of the forms of aesthetics (and their politics) as they are discordant with the framework of what counts as good, representative or indeed critical to the history of art. Rancière's philosophy implies that intervening in aesthetic practice is a political practice (and necessity), which in turn, damages the hegemony of visual grammars of cultures based on a hierarchical account of race and culture. The expression of postcolonial aesthetics as politically practiced challenges the political legacy of colonial values of 'others' and the hegemonic values of art in the gallery space.

As a cultural institution, the BM has a particular position in the imperial nodes of museum sites, which figure as 'temples of delight' (Rocco, 2013) to world cultures. The BM articulates the affective capacities of cultures displayed therein, the space of the BM is posited here as an accepted 'social order' where there are dominant logics of

what is 'made visible and invisible, sayable and unsayable, audible and inaudible' determining what is possible to perceive and which determines 'what can be thought, made or done' (Sayers, 2005). By disturbing the affective logics and 'distribution of the sensible' using a postcolonial intervention, the ground opens up for a fissuring of the seemingly universal and *consensual* account of world cultures, to expose the 'gaps' in the palate of sensibilities enabled, represented and which are expressible in this space. Within institutions such as the museum, the order of things (Foucault, 2002) and the regimes of truth (Hall, 2001), are seemingly civic, inclusive and democratic. However, the displays, narratives and taxonomies are not defined or determined by the communities themselves, and thus 'outside' of their space-time sensibilities and conscious definition. Museum spaces and their technologies, assist in the reproduction of those world views, values and perceptions, replicating hierarchies of cultural capacities, contributions and representations (Bennett, 2004 ). Through the work of Raymond at the British Museum, what is exposed is the gap between the affective sensibilities defining Māori culture by the museum, and the self-determined sensibilities and accounts of communities themselves. There is a *dissensus* effected through an active performance and presencing of a postcolonial sensibility and critique. This *presencing* of postcolonial sensibilities disrupts the seemingly accepted ideological consensus underpinning the grammars, epistemologies and taxonomies of display. The

paper illustrates how the performance and expression of postcolonial sensibilities can challenge the *consensus* or indeed the parameters of the palate on representing world cultures in museums and galleries, whilst exposing the impervious 'distribution of the sensible' that determines the perceptions and contours of understanding that play out in this pedagogical space. More specifically, Raymond's work is considered here as an example of how 'gaps' and inequality in the spaces of the museum are contested. This inequality is expressed as a postcolonial critique of the differences between the display and narration of European cultures and the value placed on the values, voices and determinations of 'other' racialized cultures within the spaces of the British Museum.

## **II Rancière's '*distribution of the sensible*'**

Rancière conceptualises contemporary societies as having eliminated true democratic process. Rancière describes Western democracies as societies sustain a form of *non-political* space sustained through 'police order' where the social order is fixed, reproduced and maintained with a seemingly inclusive *consensus*, but with an underlying anti-democratic sensibility. This 'police-order' is founded on what Rancière calls the 'distribution of the sensible'. The social world is defined by Rancière as one which is maintained by an established set of possible modes of perception that foreground any action. These prevailing modes of perception, articulate matrices of

moral geographies of a space based on palpable inclusions and exclusions. There are established 'structures of feeling' that produce the space of the public realm, which in turn are sanctioned, reproduced and maintained. However, they operate to sterilise these spaces of the potential for inclusion, change or indeed reformation. Rancière's conceptualisation of the disciplining and policing of this social order operates at the site of bodily perception. Rancière privileges the senses in fixing matrices of 'truth' through which the political is understood. This can be understood as a parallel to the role of Marxists accounts of 'struggle' between classes being the principal site of challenges to policing, law and social governance in dissent and political change. The 'distribution of the sensible' refers to a regime of what is possible and acknowledged the felt, heard, seen and perceived within this space; implicated in particular familiar patterns, inclusions and exclusions. The sensibilities of the social order disciplines and determines the boundaries of what is visible and invisible, the sayable and unsayable, audible and inaudible; defining the parameters of what can be thought, made or done. Thus the status quo, the social order is conceived as an anti-democratic, anti-political order, which attempts to maintain the existing patterns of inclusions and exclusions (albeit bodies, ideas, feelings or indeed poetics). Active politics essentially involves opposition to this 'police order', embodying a challenge to established order by the excluded, 'the part which has no part', in the name of equality and the attempt to

bring about a reconfiguration of the distribution of the sensible. This demonstration of *dispenses* is *the* moment of politics. The social order which is orchestrated as democratic is squeezed of political dissent and is thus defined as an anti-political. The spaces defined through 'police order' and the act of 'politics' are conceived as essentially oppositional. The height of political change is at the sites of the *redistribution* of the sensible at points of *dissensus*, where the palette of sanctioned sensibilities shift ground to be refigured to incorporate 'other' sensibilities and affective expressive politics.

Aesthetics in Rancière's terms are about a counter- aesthetic sensibility to the accepted order of things. Through aesthetics we can articulate affective politics and demonstrate new ways of 'doing' progressive politics (Rancière, 2004). Politics is only possible through *dissensus* (2010); a challenge to 'the distribution of the sensible' which prevails and thus a challenge to revise the aesthetic / cultural palette of exchange and dialogue. For Rancière, the sites of *politics* are outside of the sites and stages of western democracy (e.g Parliament, the local council, the judiciary); these are relegated to being sites for 'the management of capital' (1999, p113). Democracies' own technologies are thus simply a façade for 'the distribution of the sensible' that is exclusive, well-defined and seemingly consensual, but actively operating 'at a distance' and which often forecloses the prospects of real change towards equality and

governance for the needs of the many (Swyngedouw, 2011). For Rancière (2010) any dissensus is also evidence of and demonstration of the exclusionary technologies of the current distribution of the sensible. Thus the 'order of things' is disrupted by 'the part who have no part' (2010:38). In terms of the BM it is not that Māori / artefacts are not included, but that the way in which they are made present, articulated and curated are outside of the palette of perceptions and sensibilities that Māori themselves conceive of them. They have no part in self-definition and determination. There is an axis of modernity which places Māori culture outside of contemporary sensibilities, relegating to 'ancient', 'native' or indeed placed as de-historicised and timeless.

Aesthetics of dissensus are at the heart of Raymond's work and in the research presented here, interrupt, fissure and revoke the framing of Māori culture and challenge the very palate of taxonomies Māori through their *toanga*<sup>i</sup>. Raymond's politics are presented here as a set of geoaesthetics that re-determine the grammars of display and voices through which Māori culture can be articulated as postcolonial and postimperial sensibilities. Within geography there has been developing a newly emergent inclusive space for thinking and conceptualising geoaesthetics, particularly as art-geography collaborations multiply (Tolia-Kelly, 2010). However, in the 1990s, Matless (1997) argued that the making of places, geographical encounter and indeed research in cultural geography could not be separated from concerns with aesthetics.

‘(G)eography and aesthetics are always mutually constituted’ (p399) and as such the term *geoaesthetics* encapsulates this co-construction; thus all questions of aesthetics are forged through the matrices of geographical and political realms. And any

“(d)iscussion of aesthetics tends however to raise fears of idealism, indulgence, aestheticism, yet here we have very functional issues concerning how an object works, not in some narrowly utilitarian and functionalist sense but in the sense of understanding why, for example, a particular object is configured in one way and not another, and how an object might be understood less through positioning it within ostensibly wider determining contexts but by considering how those contexts are refracted through its fabric.” (Matless, 1997)

Aesthetics and the politics of aesthetics are core to the geographical engagements with expressive cultures such as the body of work entitled ‘creative geographies’ (Hawkins 2013), new art-geography collaborations (Foster and Lorimer, 2007), cartography (Barnes and Duncan, 1992), visual art (Daniels, 1993; Cosgrove, 1984;1985; Cosgrove and Daniels, 1987; Matless, 1998), music (Revill, 2000), theatre (Pratt and Johnson, 2010; Raynor, 2017); visual methodologies and exhibitions (Tolia-Kelly, 2010; 2012; 2016a). Visual cultures are core to the way in which we can examine the geopolitics and aesthetics of a national culture as displayed in a museum, gallery or

indeed an artefact. The geoaesthetics of an object or piece of art can co-constitute and reflect the 'regimes of truth' within which they are understood, and thus express the fundamental politics of display, narration and epistemic logics that dominate. The aim here is to think through the politics of aesthetics through Rancière's conceptualisation, with a view to evaluate the potential of aesthetics as a means of progressive politics for a postcolonial politics and art practice, or indeed disturb the imperial and colonial matrices of understanding (Bhabha, 1994; 2013) that frame their art and culture (Gilroy, 1987; 1993a; 1993b). The potential for progressive politics includes decolonising and making space for 'other' voices within a European dominated Art History, and an inclusive practice of display, narration and indeed self-determined accounts of culture and aesthetic values. The focus here is to think aesthetics and politics through a postcolonial lens, different from a cultural geography of posthuman aesthetics (Dixon *et al.* 2012) and an examination that is a reaffirmation of a western account of aesthetics examined through singularly conceptualised 'art-site' relations (Hawkins and Straughan, 2015). 'Art' and 'site' are not a given for postcolonial artists and as such their energies have been as much about claiming a voice as being recognised as artists that are practicing within modernity itself (Himid, 2011).



### III The possibilities for 'other' aesthetic practices

Within the academy or indeed within the museum, postcolonial interventions and critical thinking could be considered to be an active tool of dissensus, simply by being co-present. Postcolonial sensibilities provide layers of re-memories (Morrison, 1990), of antiphony (Gilroy, 1993b), and embody challenging non-Eurocentric histories, geographies and indeed cultural anthropologies. At the British Museum, for example, when confronted by a seemingly bounded account of the achievements, capabilities and material histories of human culture, dissensus could destabilise and de-territorialise the underpinnings of imperial logics of display, and the site of the body of the museum itself as a tool of governance of citizenry (Bennett, 2005). The museum-space is positioned as a space where the dominant ordering is seemingly *universal* in its sensibilities, but policed along Eurocentric and ethnocentric value systems. These sensibilities are naturalised as an agreed articulation of a consensual narrative of human hierarchies of culture. The museum space is where epistemologies, taxonomies and exhibitionary logics are seemingly dynamic, but are at once 'fixed', and in synthesis with imperial hierarchies of culture, including the *Great Chain of Being* (Lovejoy, 2011; Stepan, 1982). In alignment with Rancière, the field of perceptions within the museum space is figured through sensibilities that form 'regimes of truth' that shape the moral geography of encounter, recognition, and pedagogy which

foreclose postcolonial histories, and self-determined accounts of cultures (Tolia-Kelly, 2016a). A shift in perceptions, a challenge to accepted orders, epistemologies or indeed 'ways of seeing' could in fact become the site of the political, that enables a new redistribution of the sensible, that *includes* those not already included in the architectures of truth, heritage and narrations of 'other' cultures, determined by them.

#### **IV Thinking postcolonially with Rosanna Raymond and Rancière**

The postcolonial challenge and critique of art history is well outlined in the writings of Araeen (1987; 1991, Fanon (1961; 1967), Gandhi (2005) and Said (1979; 1994). Thematically they challenge the objectification of non-white bodies in Western culture; they counter an account of culture that are aligned with hierarchies of man based on 19<sup>th</sup> accounts of scientific racism, philosophies of art and culture. Spivak (1988) critically posits the problem of the postcolonial having a 'voice' free of the colonisers violent control and indeed their frameworks of recognition; the subaltern has to speak within the regimes of exchange (language, frameworks, cultures) that are both the tools of oppression and which are definitive of political and creative cultures. The postcolonial artist has to be understood through a colonial lens, so that they be recognised, acknowledged and sanctioned as a legitimate voice, prior to attempting to

challenge of indeed claim the ground. The postcolonial artists voice is an exemplar of an aesthetics that is interpreted as being outside the political arena. At best it has been relegated to the place of *transformation* (Ashcroft et. al. 2003). Rancière's account clears the ground for an aesthetic practice such as art produced with a postcolonial politics, as a means to unravel a challenge, which 'destroys all of the hierarchies of representation' and forms a truly democratic culture and politics. Using Rancière's account there is a synthesis then between the potential for aesthetic practices in challenging political hegemonies, and the contemporary postcolonial project of usurping the tools through which the colonial regime of truths compound marginalisation, epistemic violence and silencing the voices of the subaltern. For postcolonial artists their challenge is to revise or indeed revolutionise taxonomies of seeing art and culture. Where political systems of governance shaped upon Imperial ideologies order regimes of representation and hierarchies of value. If the practice of aesthetics in visual art, writing and other expressive forms can secure a democratisation of politics, then the cultures and grammars of society can be rewritten and reformed. Thus, what is possible is a newly democratised system of producing creative expressive cultures which are critical in the unravelling of the undemocratic world. A re-distribution of the sensible for postcolonial artists is to dismantle the hierarchies embedded in the taxonomies of culture and create a palette

of inclusivity based on dissensus and contestation. This incorporates the challenging of Imperial accounts of the *Great Chain of Being* (Lovejoy, 2011) which position European culture at the uppermost of civilisations and Aboriginal at the bottom. A postcolonial orientation in the redistribution of the sensible would mean redefining and releasing these parameters of exchange – all cultures would thus be ‘modern’ or indeed positioned within the contemporary era and not exiled to the ‘primitive’. It would be possible thus for all cultures to be an equal part of the currency exchange of new grammars, vocabularies and practices of cultural expressionism. The intervention of postcolonial aesthetics in this scenario disrupts the ‘naturalised’ account of cultural hierarchies and their associated societies. As Dikeç (2005) has iterated, Rancière’s account of space ‘becomes political in that it becomes the polemical place where a wrong can be addressed and equality can be demonstrated. It becomes an integral element of the interruption of the ‘natural’ (or, better yet, naturalized) order of domination through the constitution of a place of encounter by those that have no part in that order. The political, in this account, is signalled by this encounter as a moment of interruption’. The mode of interruption thus can be aesthetic practice. Below is an account of how there are tropes of this political intervention has been made by Raymond.

“The post-colonial era opens up new perspectives on what has been a divided world (Western modernism as opposed to ethnic art). The legendary Paris exhibition “Magiciens de la Terre”, curated by Jean Hubert Martin in 1989, left many open questions as regards the discourse about art practice in a post-ethnic and at the same time post-historic (in the sense of Western art history) way.” (<http://globalartmuseum.de/site/event/65> last accessed June 26th 2015)

As the quote above hints at, the twenty first century is a moment in both art history and geography of revision, both of theoretical and geographical alignments and imaginations. This era of post-imperial and postcolonial voices promulgates a need for the field of vision for art history to see the whole; to include all that modernity has to offer in terms of art aesthetics labelled as ethnic rather than modern and transcultural. There is a colonial underpinning to valuing cultures of racialized communities which situates them as always outside of ‘modernity’ and its histories.” (Mercer, 2012, p213)

“Nine times out of ten when “modernism” is used as a supposedly neutral descriptor it merely signifies European-American modernism.” (Mercer, 2012: 213)

The events of cultural globalization and competing concepts, such as Global Art History indicate efforts to overcome the increasingly acknowledged Eurocentricism of art history, the scholarship of which is also unravelling its universalist claims also (see

Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna 2012). There is a shift in the global art scene has brought to a head the particularity of art history's own Eurocentric geographies and theoretical bases (see Madra, 2008; Mercer, 1994; 2012). The decolonialisation of the subject thus posited as a gargantuan task. Thus for Juneja (2011) "Casting art history in a global/transcultural frame would involve questioning the taxonomies and values that have been built into the discipline since its inception and have been taken as universal."

What has been recognised since the 1980s is the significant body of work that sits outside the canon that is made by those who are inside Europe, thus within 'modernity'. These artists often sit outside of the framework of modern schools of art history and thus are negated (Araeen, 1987; Mercer, 1994). Raymond is one such artist whose anger and frustration at continually being positioned outside the canon of 'modern' art history and relegated to 'ethnographic displays' has led her to address the limitations of the gallery and museum to the space of performance. Rosanna Raymond is born in New Zealand, is self-defined Samoan-English descent, and for the greater part of her career has lived and worked in London. She was a founding member of the acclaimed art collective *Pacific Sisters*<sup>ii</sup>, and was co-curator and artistic director of the *Pasifika Styles*<sup>iii</sup> festival in Cambridge between 2006 and 2008. Her aesthetic practice centres on the aesthetics and positioning of the savage body, outside of accounts of international, modern, intellectual and philosophical art

incorporates *activism* (Raymond, 2003). Raymond in her poem below outlines her positioning as a result of continued misrepresentations of Māori / Polynesian culture and art at museum spaces such as the BM. In the film '*Where Art Thou Toanga?*'

<sup>iv</sup>Raymond argues that there is problem with the taxonomies of the BM, including an epistemic violence of labelling them as 'artefact' and the deadening effect of the cabinet, locked away from their true nature as enlivened and part of modernity and not pre-modernity (see Tolia-Kelly, 2016b).

"It still hurts my ears when I hear the word *artefact*. It still hurts my ears when I see and hear the grass skirt. You just know that this grass skirt is actually made of usually hibiscus fibre, and it has a particular way that it is procured, that plus how many hours go into it. That it would have danced and swished around and made great noise and so it was all these little things just kept triggering more and more inside me as an artist to how I could bridge the gap in this dormant state that I saw them in, and how we conveyed them as a living dynamic.

Because I suppose indigenous is, non–intellectual, it's very hard for people to associate indigeneity with contemporary." (Personal Interview in Tolia-Kelly, 2016a)

Raymond's poem *A Throng of God's* further outlines the tropes of dissensus that she activates in her work. There is a need for a revision of time-space conceptualisations and a closure of the gap between deity and object and a recognition of the place of the *toanga* in modernity, as part of the matrices of living, enlivening and giving meaning to Māori *futures*. There is a call to a different set of sensibilities, co-ownership, and proper affective stewardship of *toanga*, within collective streams of consciousness that have been disconnected and disavowed. Reparations are called for entailing a disruption of the very frameworks of understanding the life of objects, the viewers of objects, and temporal and spatial framings of *toanga* outside of colonial time-space.

***A Throng of Gods* (Rosanna Raymond)**

A throng of gods

Assembled in silence

Accused of decadence

Offered out of deference

Emptied of resonance

Collected for reference

And now in idol consideration



Engaged in your estrangement

I gaze at you like a stranger

Enjoying your sing song

that fell on deaf ears

I give you my name

And you give me your number

To revive you

To revere you

Raymond as a poet, performer, dancer, artist, curator and founder of the *Pacific Sisters* creative collective, has many tropes of activating dissensus. Another example of her political aesthetic practice is expressed in her challenge to the Māori / Polynesian motif of the *Dusky Maiden*. This is an example of Raymond through performing this motif, challenging the 'distribution of the sensible' that reasserts the epistemic violences of the imperial 'ways of seeing'. Her performance at the site of the museum is a vehicle for taking power, and taking charge of labels, definitions and categorisations. The aesthetics of her piece draws from the eighteenth century oil paintings of Captain Cook's resident artist William Hodges, to the works of Paul Gauguin, and into the present, the image of Pacific Island women as semi-clad, naïve

yet sexually receptive. The passivity of the sensually centered maiden is overturned through Raymond's account of the powerful goddesses, power that combines the visceral power of her sexualized body, its potency and strength. In a performance *The Dusky Ain't Dead She's Just Diversified*, Raymond reclaims the Dusky Maiden (Raymond, 2011), exposing her latent power and reaffirms the dynamic and more-than-object of the two-dimensional savage beauty dominated in Western visual discourse. She embodies *Full Tusk Maiden* (Tamaira, 2010), as a challenging form to expose the gaps in the art historical and museological account of Māori / Polynesian sensibilities. The politics of her challenge to art history is fissured through the intimate yet violent tactility of her adornments; she is visceral yet not the submissive viscosity of Gauguin's fantasy maidens. She responds to the objectification of 'other' women by threatening the objectifying eye with erasure itself. Erasure has been and is at constant play when she is expressing her art and consciousness. Epistemic violence (Code, 2006) and erasure are the burden of the dusky maiden of old, but now form the fabric of a politics of aesthetics that threatens the eye and the constituency of the gallery space itself. Raymond's greatest 'weapon' in goddess form is her powerful use of the senses and sensibilities that are at odds with each other. In the civilized space of the gallery to be confronted with the power of the sensual form that is the *Dusky Maiden*, which is unusually returning the gaze, situates a routinized European sensibility as foreign,

discordant and impotent. Raymond fills the space with embodied responses to the reductive colonial gaze and epistemic violences of naming the 'other' as savage, sexually rather than intellectually driven, and physical rather than poetic, renders the Maiden both in the terms of the sensual, but also in terms of the exact opposite of what the figure of the maiden is supposed to be. The counter-essentialism of Raymond's performance requires a double-take, it requires an un-fixing of the gaze, open to the possibility of an unbounded subject, philosophical, sensual, transnational and unfixed from any locale. The maiden takes the place of the geographies of the usually Occidental figure for whom traversing the globe as a free subject is second nature, and for whom living out a sexual fantasy in the Orient is again always possible (Richard Phillips). It is through disturbing the usual grammars that are at play in the exhibition space, that Raymond creates a space for being and representation; where she claims the right to self-determination and challenges the epistemic violences that have gone before.



Image 1: Rosanna Raymond, *Full Tusk Maiden* (accessed 17/5/2017:

<http://www.tautai.org/artist/rosanna-raymond/>)

Raymond's performance challenges the grammars of museum and art spaces alike.

There is a disruption to the consensus and an account of universal narrativisation of other cultures. Through her body, Raymond challenges sedimented sensibilities, the staid political order at various levels: body-to-body; savage to colonizer; intellectual eye to the embodied eye; from objectification to dialogue and more. Raymond, through the senses and sensibilities that are refigured through her performance *creates* the space for articulating her cultural geographies. Her contemporary identity as being Samoan and English, modern and artful, poetic and playful are expressed through her dance. Reclaiming the territory of being unbounded by the burden of representation (Mercer, 1994) and free from the frameworks of representation defined through an essentialising imperial gaze (Barnett, 1998; Hall, 1997; Gilroy,

1993b). The collapsing of the looking-onto (visitor), and the looked-at (subject of show) psychology of the exhibition space and experience of black artists, allows Raymond to re-set the parameters. The exhibition derives extra dimensions for expression and praxis; aesthetics and politics. Here the refiguring of the dynamics between aesthetics, sensibilities and the moral geographies of the gallery space, collapses the possibilities for politics. Raymond's exhibition of her performance piece, disrupts the *distribution of the sensible* (Rancière 2004) and charges the atmosphere, affectively, powerful, with the transformative potential of any political struggle. The habits of exchange, the usual currency of exchange are redundant; new dialogues are called into the space, leveling the field of vision, being and politics that has been figured through an Imperial, Eurocentric art history. The universalism at the base of the philosophy of critical evaluation of art is exposed as impotent in the face of the Dusky Maiden, and her sensuous sexual force of being there, taking space and making new grammars of exchange. The usual grammars of encounter are washed away creating new expressive sites for being artist of a transnational past and modern orientation. Raymond thus strips away the layers of categorization compounded over centuries, repeated through various regimes of seeing the 'other' as ethnic, as savage as feminine and most importantly sensual. Raymond uses the realm of the sensory to shatter the legacies of solidified aesthetic regimes of epistemic violence to self-determine a new political

grammar, a recognizable form of art-politics that cannot be contained within the old regime of seeing. As Berrebi states:

“Stripped from these categorisations, what defines the work of art in the aesthetic regime is its belonging to what Rancière calls a specific ‘sensorium’ — something like a way of being — in which it will be perceived as art.” (Berrebi, 2008)

Raymond through her performances at the museum, strips away the dynamic set between European and ‘other’, and challenges the discourse on civility and savagery that has driven the legacy of colonialism. Her intent however, is not negation, but dialogue, but this time on an equal footing, with respectful orientations, through a reworked palette of sensibilities, ensuring that they are in alignment. Taking a step back to Spivak (1988) there are other dimensions to the visual that also get incorporated through Raymond’s performance. These other elements are aspects to her political challenge that cannot be reconciled with Rancière’s delimited account of the visual. Because the visual is not simply a completely, bounded, lens based encounter; here the visual incorporates deep violent histories of the Māori people. The ‘distribution of the sensible’ that Raymond is challenging, spans many lifetimes, eons, across many time-spaces, there is a politics of the unspoken, lost, and processual

violences; those unseen, unspeakable truths that are evaded. Through the rhythms and poetics of Raymond's *full tusk maiden* we can hear the past that resonate through her body and space; past memories of violences and negations, but those voices that were 'other' to the sanctioned representation of 'Māori'. Speaking along with Raymond are the landscapes of past ecologies and re-memories (TOLIA-KELLY, 2004) that cannot be visualised on canvas, but are resonant and emergent through visual practice. For Māori time's past and present are not separate, including those bodies of ancestors, Raymond argues that the representation of the Dusky Maiden is an epistemic violence that mirrors many others. The violent subjugation of colonised, the sexualised and infantilised account of their relationship to land, time, non-human, are all part of the mis-calculations of 'others' promoted by the Imperial way of seeing. Smith (2007) articulates this in her argument that for Māori '(w)e do not, however speak of the past and present as if they are rigidly demarcated, for our ancestors live on in us and in the landscape, and we are constantly aware of their presence... (it is) the wrongs done to our forebears that have resulted in the mental, emotional, and spiritual turmoil of recent times ' (p213-4).

### **Postcolonial affective economies and 'Ordinary affects'**

Taking the visual beyond the biology of the eye is critical to understanding postcolonial artists and their contribution to visual culture. The long held dialogue between cultural studies and Art History, have been precisely about dealing with visual culture beyond an account of representation (Hall 1997; Mercer, 2012; Gilroy, 1993a). Stewart's (2007) account of 'Ordinary Affects' enables us to reflect upon the affective flows that drive sensations and politics in the everyday. Stewart is inspired by cultural theorists such as Raymond Williams and the cultural materialism of thinking 'structures of feeling'. Both writers insist on retaining attention towards the concrete in people's lives without reducing their lives to objects, moments or indeed solid, reductive accounts of cultures. For Williams 'social experience is *still in process* or in 'solution'. Josh Dickens's account throws light on the nature of Williams's refusal to 'fix', but to consider 'structures of feeling' in continued dynamic process, as he terms this 'unarticulated pre-emergence' (Dickens, 2008:2). The conversation between Stewart and Raymond is at the heart of Rosanna Raymond's positioning. There are parallels between William's account of immanence and the need for attunement to an event as sensation, as animated and inhabitable (2007, p2). In this current climate of the neo-theoretical turns of Embodied, Non-Representational and the More-Than Representational, the foundational scholarship on representation has been misrepresented itself. For Hall (1992; 1996) representation of world cultures cannot be understood without an embodied



understanding of what it is like to be black-British and to hold a an affective memory of both epistemic, and systemic violences of the colonial era (see Morrison, 1990 also), the modern British state and the regimes of representation (which led to material racist practice) of the media. Representational logics were tied up with the Imperial eye and the categorisations of peoples not just through phenotype (Saldanha, 2006), but through the assumptions promoted about their capacities to feel, and to think. Feeling, thinking, affective memory and the self-determination of your capacities to creatively express are what is at stake for postcolonial peoples when visiting the national spaces of culture. The representations of the Dusky Maiden, or the Māori savage have been compounded for centuries, they form into layers of alienation, pain and non-identification with the national story. Over time this compounding consolidates and compresses to the immoveable memory that is postcolonial pain without tools of independent expression, beyond those of the coloniser. For Rosanna Raymond, the Full Tusk Maiden performance about making you in the audience, ‘feel’ the carbonised layers of oppression, but also about using affective politics to open up the space for dialogue. As Stewart argues ‘power is a thing of the senses’ and that through that commonality of humane sensibilities, Raymond attempts to nudge the memory of the past for all to claim, and thus opens the possibility of renewal and regeneration. This includes collapsing the old fixities and the opening of the possibility

to be different with one another (Māori and non-Māori, audience and subject). Power, is taken back by Raymond through the senses. Power to represent herself and to re-orientate the lens, this includes taking the power back to the room of people that reject these epistemic and systemic violences. The transfer of power then is about disturbing those set lines of colonial/postcolonial, oppressor/oppressed, the Imperial eye/ the oppressed subject and to open up the grounds for a new politics of seeing Māori, being political and shifting the distribution of the sensible towards a humane account of 'others'.

Forty years ago Raymond Williams (1977) argued that 'The strongest barrier to (the) recognition of human cultural activity is (the) immediate and regular conversion of experience into finished products. . . this denies them their full lived realities and strips them of their active, living dynamism'. The articulation of William's alienation from the cabinets of display is borne from this particularising effect of categories, and the deadening effect of the Imperial eye onto Māori culture and toanga. Stewart (2007) argues clearly that we should not be about making representations, objects 'known' or knowable (p4), but to fashion some sort of address that is adequate to their form' (p4). By doing this, these cultural forms get removed from living worlds and become ripe for 'fascination'. By thinking through the *ordinary affects* we engage, inhabit and animate the 'live surface of difference at work' (p4), producing a 'contact zone for analysis' (p5).

“Ideologies happen. Power snaps into place. Structures grow entrenched. Identities take place. Ways of knowing become habitual at the drop of a hat. But it’s ordinary affects that give things the quality of a *something* to inhabit and animate.” (p16).

The politics of art practice, it could be argued, is to make us feel. The politics of postcolonial expressive cultures too have incorporated the project of making us feel, the positioning of the postcolonial subject (see Morrison, 2012). Inhabiting and making the audience *feel* a space of embodied violation, engenders a political transformation of empathy and thus a spirit of change. For artists such as Raymond, inhabiting the space of the violated enables the eradication of the structures of repeating those violations, through sight, sound, memory and text. Raymond’s project is to animate, to show the hauntings of eons of peoples who have been misrepresented, and undermined, right down to their capacities to feel and think. Finding a *place* from which to simultaneously shatter mistruths and to articulate new ones is the project for Raymond; the site of the body becomes the counter-museum, counter-culture and counter-memory, all at once. The role of geographer-artist collaboration in this project has been to articulate, to enable, to make visible, to co-visualise the burdens of representation that figure Māori artists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and map the cultural

geographies of the new visualisations necessary for a redistribution of the sensible. A small modest step, in the space of a paper, a catalogue, an event that shifts the ground from beneath calcified layers of compounded memories and mistruths of Imperial representation.

## V Conclusion

The example of Raymond's practice grounds the argument of where 'race' sits in our cultural geographies of aesthetics and selfdetermined accounts of being Māori / Polynesian. For postcolonial artists, they bear both the burden of representation, and a notion that their creative voice should be read through the framework of art based on imperial cultural taxonomies (Araeen, 1987). Mercer (1994) posits two obstacles, namely, one of articulating in a recognisable voice, and secondly articulating through recognisable aesthetics. Essentialism has always been a problem (Gilroy, 1993a; 1993b) if you are Māori then the expectation is that you will produce a colonially defined and imagined 'Māori' art in style, form and vocabularies. Raymond's art practice exemplifies how imperial frames can be usurped. Raymond's reified mirroring of cultural expectations of the Dusky Maiden redraw the palette of possibilities of being seen, recognised, and identified through a renewed political sensibility forged through *dissensus*. The sensibilities upon which the assumptions about Dusky Maidens from Polynesia are over turned; there is a redistribution of the sensible, instigated by Raymond's refiguring of the senses within the room. This is not a surface redistribution, as the audience *feels* the epistemic violences from which she is drawn. The outputs of collaboration enables this redistribution to be narrated, cited and become part of a

counter-culture of what it is to *be*; to extend the cultural geographies of one that has had the burden of essential accounts of what 'others' are in Polynesia.

Rancière is not proposed here as being unproblematic, but as a tool to consider ways to intervene and inspire shift changes in cultural representation and self-determination in the cultural sphere of the museum. One problematic of iterating Rancière in this account is developed by Isin (2002) namely that, Rancière's politics fail to acknowledge that the visible and the invisible are integral and he 'fails, therefore, to question the very order of things and loses its subversive or transversal quality' (Isin, 2002: 277). It is precisely for this reason that the *body*, the *senses* and the embodied nature of the politics of *representation* have been discussed here as being integral to the understanding of art and postcolonial politics. Stewart (2007) also has been a driving force in thinking anthropological accounts of politics through the senses, advocating high levels of attunement to the drivers of *political power* as being located within the spheres of the senses. It's important to understand that the *sphere of the senses* is not a reified sphere that operates beyond the economic or political. It is itself located within the logics of the global economy. For any artists, creative practitioners or academics wanting to create spaces of alterity and political challenge, it is a time of erasure. Thrift (2012) chimes with Rancière's account. Thrift argues that the creative landscape internationally has shifted to one where creativity is co-opted into capitalist

production, and individualised to the point of being in synthesis with dreams, memories, reactions and hopes. These often mask the pressures which reaffirm power structures within dominant cultural institutions such as museums. These are the very sites that Raymond argues have silenced postcolonial, Māori knowledges, values and grammars of creative expression. Disturbing representational politics implicates the artist-curator as being beholden to the institutions that are at the heart of reproducing dominant *regimes of truth*. It is important then to be mindful of the cultures of ‘enablement’ which can become merely tools of co-option rather than co-curation. It is here that Thrift’s (2012) projections become highly illustrative of the ways that aesthetics are at the heart of the *politics of the sensible*. Aesthetic practices are co-opted into the *expressive infrastructure*. The spaces of postcolonial art and aesthetics are double-edged and perhaps delimited in their potential by producing new aesthetic conceptualisations and practice *within* the palette of acceptable ‘politics’, defined, valued and funded by the state. Dissensus is thus always conditional, and dependent on *being*, having a territory, site, a voice or body from which to evoke political change.

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<sup>1</sup> *Toanga* in Māori culture is an object or natural resource which is highly prized

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ii <https://www.facebook.com/PacificSisters/>

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